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AUTHOR MARTIN, WARREN ERYAN; WILKINSON, JUDITH K.  
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## ABSTRACT

THIS ARTICLE DEALS WITH THE CONCEPT OF CLUSTER COLLEGES, ONE METHOD OF RESTRUCTURING THE UNIVERSITY. THE CENTER CONDUCTED A RESEARCH PROJECT TO DETERMINE WHETHER CERTAIN ATTITUDES, VALUES AND INTERESTS OF STUDENTS AND FACULTY AT CLUSTER COLLEGES DIFFERED FROM THOSE AT OTHER COLLEGES. RESULTS INDICATED THAT CLUSTER COLLEGE FACULTY AND STUDENTS WERE MORE CONCERNED ABOUT THE INSTITUTION'S EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY AND WERE MORE KNOWLEDGEABLE ABOUT IT THAN THEIR COUNTERPARTS ELSEWHERE. THEY WERE ALSO MORE OPEN TO CHANGE, INNOVATION AND EXPERIMENTATION IN EDUCATION. BECAUSE CLUSTER COLLEGES ARE NEW, INNOVATIVE AND MUST COMPETE WITH INSTITUTIONS HAVING TRADITIONAL PROGRAMS FOR FUNDS, THEY MUST EVALUATE THEMSELVES AND THEIR GOALS TO A GREATER EXTENT. THIS ACCOUNTS FOR SOME OF THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THEIR STUDENTS AND THE CLUSTER COLLEGE GROUPS. (AF)

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NON-DIFFERENCES THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Warren Bryan Martin  
Judith K. Wilkinson

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE  
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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# NON-DIFFERENCES THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE

**T**HE RESTRUCTURING of the American university has become a major concern of administrators, faculty, and students, as well as of legislators, parents, and the general public. Not all of the problems besetting higher education can be answered by organizational realignments. However, tendencies to impersonality and rigidity may be alleviated by such structural innovations as new governance configurations, fresh programs, environmental architecture, curriculum revisions, and changes in organizational charts.

Because such innovations are but a partial response to current needs, curiosity is increasing about various forms of more inclusive innovation. The cluster college concept—whereby a campus within an educational system or a sub-unit on a campus is authorized to innovate on a holistic or programmatic level—is probably the form of comprehensive innovation that is now receiving the most attention. Indeed 40 colleges and universities across the country have already established or are in the process of organizing one or another variation on the cluster college theme, as in federated colleges, academic sub-units, and experimental colleges.

But what are the prospects that this approach to change, this way of restructuring the university, will have substantial effects? It appears that everything being tried in the cluster colleges was originated elsewhere and tried in many places. Is the cluster college concept another fad? And, whether characterized by old or new ideas, do these colleges make a difference in the lives of faculty and students populating them? Differences that make no difference, William James used to argue, are not differences. Could it be that these colleges, no different in the particulars of their organization somehow, when everything is put together, make a difference—at least for their own faculty and students, and in the context of the educational system of which they are a part?

This was, in fact, a conclusion of one the Center's research projects—the Institutional Character study. Certain attitudes, values, interests, and endeavors of faculty and students associated with the cluster colleges in this research project were sufficiently different from those of faculty and students in other colleges to make the conclusion inescapable that the clustering arrangement either effected changes in individuals or provided a setting where those with a particular value orientation could come together.

Differences were mainly in two areas. First, the cluster college faculty and students were more concerned about the institution's educational philosophy and were more knowledgeable about it than were their counterparts elsewhere. Second, the faculty and students at cluster colleges were more open to the idea of challenging conventional approaches to liberal education. Innovation and experimentation were discernible characteristics of life in the cluster colleges.

The Institutional Character study questionnaires were

distributed in the fall of 1966 and the spring of 1967. Of 2669 faculty members in eight participating institutions, 1098 received the faculty questionnaire. A total of 577 questionnaires were returned, representing 53 percent of those polled. Some variation of the cluster college idea had become operational in three of the eight institutions studied: the University of California, the University of the Pacific, and Hofstra University. These are the institutions evaluated here. Questionnaires were received from a total of 67 faculty members in the five cluster colleges and from 325 faculty members in the four traditionally organized colleges of the same university systems.

For the purposes of this analysis, faculty from cluster colleges as a group were compared with their traditional counterparts as a group, then individual pairs of colleges within the same institutional system were examined to see if the general conclusion was supported in the specific example.

Student questionnaires were received from more than 90 percent of the entering freshmen students at the following institutions: Davis (1523) and Santa Barbara (2676), College of the Pacific (416) and Raymond (88), New College (80) and the College of Arts and Sciences (546). Cowell College students were not studied, but questionnaires were received from 213 freshmen at Stevenson and 480 at Revelle.

## AWARENESS OF EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

One assumption of the study was that institutional character would be defined by respondents, whether administrators, faculty, or students, in terms of the stated goals and purposes of their colleges or universities. We expected that in a vital institution there would be good congruence between professed and perceived objectives as well as between individual and institutional goals. It was our concern, therefore, to ascertain how much project participants knew about the philosophy and objectives of their schools and what they thought to be the importance of these matters for their colleagues.

One item in the faculty questionnaire invited respondents to indicate the extent to which their institution's educational philosophy and general objectives were emphasized during the negotiations that went on before they were employed. Sixty-nine percent of the faculty at cluster colleges reported that "institutional objectives were treated at length" while only five percent of the faculty at non-cluster colleges answered this way and 52 percent of them said that, on the contrary, when they were being considered for employment "the emphasis was clearly on the work of the department." A comparison of individual colleges, paring cluster with non-cluster units, showed that the result just mentioned was the case on each campus (Table 1).

Another item asked faculty to estimate the proportion of their colleagues who were seriously interested in the educational objectives that were supposed to give direction and character to the institutions with which they were as-

TABLE 1  
Emphasis During Faculty Job Negotiation on Institutional Objectives as Compared to Departmental Duties

	Emphasis on Institutional Objectives	Emphasis on Work of Department
University of the Pacific		
*Raymond . . . . .	78%	0%
COP . . . . .	13	26
Hofstra University		
New College . . . .	100	0
Arts and Sciences . .	5	48
University of California		
*Cowell . . . . .	79	0
*Stevenson . . . . .	69	6
*Revelle . . . . .	36	7
Davis . . . . .	4	60
Santa Barbara . . . .	4	51

\* cluster college

sociated. Cluster college respondents said that "almost all" of their faculty members were seriously concerned with institutional purposes. Meanwhile, faculty in the non-cluster colleges were split between answering that "well over half" or "about half" of their colleagues were concerned, while 18 percent said that this was the case with only "one-fourth or so."

When students entering the colleges under consideration were asked, "How much do you know about the general philosophy of the college you are attending?" the same pattern of differentiation that has been seen in the faculty samples was repeated. The freshmen at the cluster colleges professed to know a lot about their school's educational philosophy, while the youth at the non-cluster colleges varied from claims of "a little" knowledge to no knowledge at all. The same results came from a questionnaire item in which students were asked whether they thought their college had a distinctive quality. Eighty-eight percent of the cluster college respondents thought this to be the case, compared with only 57 percent of the others.

Whether consideration is given to students or faculty, then, persons in cluster colleges were more likely to be knowledgeable about institutional objectives and educational philosophy, and to show interest in their institution's distinctive features, than were students or faculty in the non-cluster settings.

In considering the broad aims of the undergraduate experience, about 60 percent of the faculty in both of the samples agreed that the most important aim was to develop in the student an ability to think and to understand the consequences of his actions. A second, similar goal favored by faculty was to develop in the student a capacity for good judgment. Vocational or professional training for both types of schools ranked very low.

Entering students as groups in both the cluster and the non-cluster colleges, on the other hand, accepted vocationalism as the first goal of their educational experience.

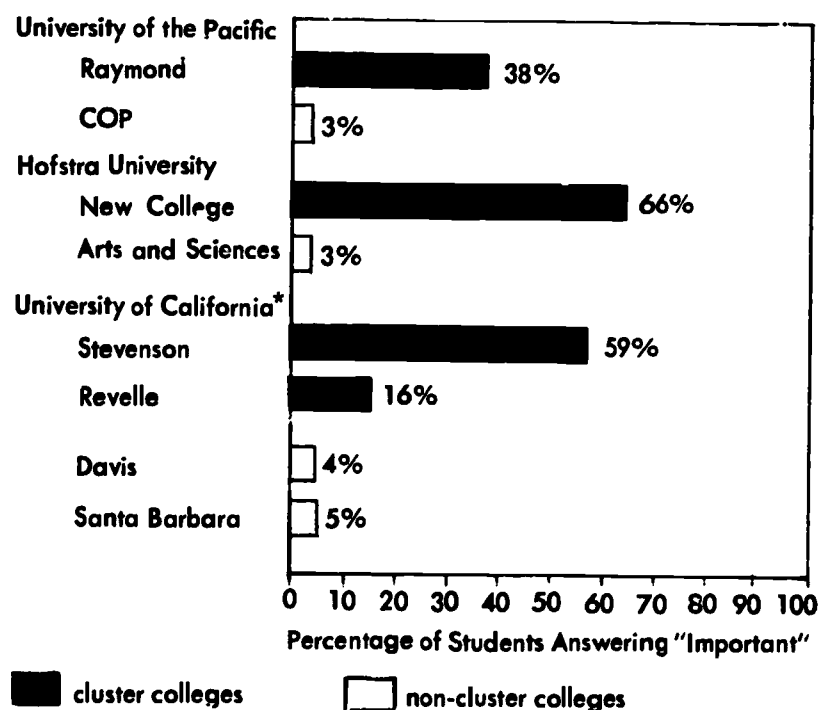
Forty-four percent of the non-cluster college students and 38 percent of the students from cluster colleges chose this option. Thus, a definite tension existed between the goal favored by faculty and the one most important to students. It is instructive to notice, however, that this difference was reduced in the cluster colleges. There, more than on the non-cluster campuses, freshmen showed a stronger intellectual orientation, 33 percent of them compared with 24 percent of the non-cluster students answering that their objective was "To acquire and use the skills and habits involved in critical and constructive thinking." An examination of the individual cluster college samples showed that students at Raymond and Stevenson definitely chose the intellectual over the vocational objective while students at New College, Hofstra, were split 30 to 31 percent between these two goals. Revelle students were the only cluster college student sample to show a preference for vocational goals. An imperfect but better congruence thus existed between faculty and students in the cluster colleges regarding the aims of the educational program than was the case in the more conventional institutions.

#### OPENNESS TO CHANGE, INNOVATION, AND EXPERIMENTATION

At a time of societal change, it was expected that all respondents in the Institutional Character study would equate institutional vitality and distinctiveness with the capacity of their colleges or universities to identify with the current mood of change and to show interest in specific forms of change. But, in fact, the attitude of the cluster college faculty toward innovation was markedly different from that of the faculty from non-cluster colleges.

When respondents were asked to indicate whether their colleagues would be "willing to participate personally in experimental educational ventures," the faculty sample in cluster colleges said that "most" of their associates were so inclined. Faculty at the more established campuses, meanwhile, were much more likely to say that "some" or

FIGURE 1  
Percentages of Students Saying that an Opportunity to Participate in Experimental Educational Programs was Important in their Selection of their College





perhaps "about half" of their peers would participate personally in experimental educational ventures. This conclusion is sustained when attention is directed to a comparison of individual colleges.

Support for innovation and experimentation was found among the students of cluster colleges as well as the faculty. Student respondents were asked whether "an opportunity to participate in experimental educational programs" was an important consideration in the selection of the college they were then entering. Such an opportunity was a much more important criterion in the selection of colleges for the cluster college group than for the non-cluster students. Thirty-three percent of the students from cluster colleges compared with only four percent of their counterparts said this was "important" (Figure 1).

When freshmen were asked to describe the "ideal college," and were queried on whether it would be "traditional" or "experimental," students in the non-cluster colleges described their ideal college as one that would be traditional while students in the cluster colleges chose to describe their ideal college as experimental.

From one perspective these findings from student data appear obvious. Of course, students at innovative colleges will describe their ideal college as experimental and declare that an opportunity to participate in experimental programs is important to them. To say otherwise would be to refute their choices and confound their situation. But the point not so obvious, yet very important, is that structural provisions for change, innovation, and experimentation, as concentrated in the cluster college, are shown to be effective in drawing together like-minded people or in producing an anticipatory identification with the ideal of the college by the students who come there.

While interdisciplinary contacts at the faculty level, or cross-disciplinary teaching arrangements are hardly new ideas, the departmental and disciplinary mentality has become so deeply entrenched in the preferences and habits of American professors that a show of willingness by faculty to encourage such contacts or teach under such arrangements must be taken as evidence of an openness toward change. Faculty in cluster colleges expressed such an interest in interdisciplinary arrangements. Seventy-three percent of the cluster college faculty, compared with only 30 percent of the non-cluster faculty, said that "interdisciplinary faculty contacts and teaching opportunities" were "very important." In another item, respondents at cluster colleges showed theoretical support for cross-disciplinary teaching, 49 percent of them saying it was "very important," compared with 21 percent of the faculty elsewhere.

Cluster college faculty were also more likely to favor changes in the degree of control over students' personal lives than colleges have traditionally shown. On the item, "The concept of *in loco parentis* is unnecessary and undesirable because students should have the freedoms and responsibilities of adults," a majority of faculty in all schools represented in the project tended to support the idea, but the degree of support was stronger in the cluster colleges (64 percent) than in the non-cluster group (50 percent).

## CONCLUSION

Cluster colleges are not unique in their commitment to the indefinable liberal arts, or in their concern for the improvement of teaching and learning through innovations, or in other responses they make to challenges facing the institution of higher education. But we found that they were different from the university system of which they were a part in ways likely to be relevant to the reforms, changes, and improvements that are more and more regarded as mandatory to the success of American higher education. The cluster college faculty and students, unlike their counterparts in the non-cluster colleges, had an increased awareness of educational philosophy and an openness to change, innovation, and experimentation. They had a sense of mission and were quite proud of it.

Circumstances might explain the differences between the cluster college faculty and students and the non-cluster college groups. In a day in which most institution of higher education have had no time or stomach for the articulation and implementation of institutional purposes (being too busy with quantitative criteria and too skeptical of ideologies to be philosophically oriented) the new and avowedly innovative college such as the cluster college is compelled by the necessity for action in the context of rapid sociopolitical change to decide at least provisionally what it is for, as well as what it is against. Such a college is driven back to the eternal questions. In the competition for funding and status it dare not be content to sing a "me-too" tune. The college has been commissioned to be different in order to be relevant and this means trying to shape some timely answers to those eternal questions.

Perhaps it was the creation of an organizational unit with its own program and facilities that made it possible for conservative or even reactionary ideas to hit persons who had been charged with the responsibility for being different with the weight of newness. That which from one perspective appears as only patching and pasting, is seen from another as a creative montage. In the cluster college, old ideas are seen from a different perspective and so seem new. The possibility is thus improved that innovations that are elsewhere being tried separately, partially, or in a less holistic fashion will be regrouped or revised in such a way as to produce a vital hybrid.

In the cluster college, students and faculty bring with them a high degree of courage and commitment — they are, after all, taking risks — and in turn, the college that has been forced by its circumstances to be self-conscious, critical, and definitive has something special to give these students and faculty. Thus, while that which students and faculty bring to a college is important to the character of the institution, that which the college brings to the person is important to the character of the individual and, as an ancillary benefit, to the character of the college.

It is in the interaction of individuals and institutions that the old becomes new and that which in itself is a difference that makes no difference becomes a non-difference that makes a difference.

Warren Bryan Martin  
Judith K. Wilkinson